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JAMES HENRY BREASTED

MEDINET HABU STUDIES

1928/29

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MEDINET HABU STUDIES
1928/29

I

THE ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY

By UVO HÖLSCHER

II

THE LANGUAGE OF THE HISTORICAL TEXTS COMMEMORATING RAMSES III

By JOHN A. WILSON

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FOREWORD

This second preliminary report on the work of the Oriental Institute at Medinet Habu furnishes an even more convincing demonstration of the need for further study of this important site than could have been anticipated. Systematic clearance of the huge inclosure is steadily revealing the impressive architectural character of the great complex of temple, palace, dwellings, offices, and garden, all combined in a double fortress with enormous inner and outer walls. For the first time we see disclosed the detailed plan of a royal residence combined with a temple; and Dr. Hölscher's discerning eye has discovered also much of the palace superstructure which we had never dared hope to recover.

It is to be hoped that the friends of archaeological research, as well as professional archaeologists, will share our pleasure in seeing preserved the plans and the disposition of the rooms in the royal apartment. It is now possible for the modern visitor to walk through this palace of the twelfth century before the Christian Era, passing from reception hall to sleeping-rooms and baths, and to understand completely the arrangement of the entire palace. The sandstone doorposts, once prostrate and scattered at all angles among the débris of the palace, are now re-united to form doorways, each in its proper place and again connected by inclosing walls. The smaller modern bricks employed in the restoration work will, as Dr. Hölscher shows, preclude any confusion between old original construction still surviving and the restored portions. Now, for the first time, the formerly somber and confused ruins on the south side of the great Medinet Habu temple are intelligible to the visitor and very helpful to the archaeologist as well. These instructive results of the clearance on the east and south sides of the great inclosure suggest the possibility of even more important revelations when the less disturbed areas on the west and north have been cleared, for these latter regions are covered with much deeper accumulations than is any other part of the inclosure.

The written and sculptured documents on the walls of the great

temple, of which Dr. Wilson writes, are likewise substantially repaying the work the Institute is devoting to them. The first volume of a series of folios, in which the Institute is planning to issue a complete publication of the temples of Medinet Habu, will be devoted to the earlier historical records of Ramses III. It will contain fifty-four plates (two in color) with introductory text by Dr. Nelson. That volume, now on the press, should be available almost contemporaneously with this preliminary report.

JAMES HENRY BREASTED

PASADENA, CALIFORNIA
February 22, 1930

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I

THE ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY

By UVO HÖLSCHER

In our first campaign of excavation at Medinet Habu, during the season of 1927/28,[1] we had cleared within its huge rectangle a portion of the area which lay south of the great temple. In our second campaign (1928/29) we have excavated the adjacent southeastern portion. Although during the first season we had had only a site long since almost completely ransacked and ravaged, we found this time a tract in part undisturbed, so that it had preserved the records of the most diverse cultures in a more or less complete sequence. At the bottoms of various shafts sunk to the ground-water level, we kept coming upon heaped-up gravel with which were mingled numerous prehistoric potsherds. It looks as though we have here no artificial heaps piled up by human hands, but pebbles washed down by torrents along with potsherds of primitive cultures.

The oldest walls at Medinet Habu, as far as we see now, hardly antedate the beginning of the Empire, i.e., the middle of the second millennium B.C. In the newly excavated area to the southeast the foundations of strong walls made of mud bricks bearing the names of the kings Thutmose III and Thutmose IV give a definite clue. Again, to the northeast we had found during the previous year the inclosure walls of the well-known Eighteenth Dynasty temple. Their bricks are stamped with the cartouches of Queen Hatshepsut, the predecessor of Thutmose III. Only one single brick wall, unfortunately undated, is still older. Our previous investigations, then, indicate that the oldest demonstrable settlement on the site of Medinet Habu goes back to the time between the Middle Kingdom and the Empire, and that the small Eighteenth Dynasty temple (*F 10* on the plan, Fig. 1) was its cultural center.

[1] See report in "Oriental Institute Communications" (hereafter abbreviated to *OIC*), No. 5.

Ramses III seems to have done away with this whole village when he had the "Hill of the Lord of Life" leveled for his great temple and palace. He allowed only the old Eighteenth Dynasty sanctuary to remain, and included it within his girdle wall. Since then it has looked out of place, because it lies at an oblique angle with reference to the axis of the Ramessid buildings.

Our most important task is naturally to acquaint ourselves thoroughly and accurately with Ramses III's imposing plan: the girdle wall with its fortified gate, the great temple of Amon, the royal palace, and all the other structures which belong to this enormous establishment. But the later strata likewise can on no account be neglected. For they too are individually of great significance in the history of culture and of art, and provide a valuable means of understanding the later development not only of Medinet Habu but of Egypt as a whole.

Here and there over the Ramessid building-remains lay undisturbed strata of rubbish, still 6–8 meters high, dating from about 1000 B.C. to the second millennium after Christ. From the depth of this accumulation we realize that the royal splendor at Medinet Habu did not last long. Soon after the death of Ramses III the powerful rectangular inclosure became a refuge for the population of the neighborhood. At that period the whole district became filled with wretched huts located hit or miss on narrow, crooked alleys like the modern *fellahin* villages. Among these inhabitants naturally were the priests of the great Ramessid temple. Their number and wealth had probably already dwindled considerably. The temple itself at this time apparently was little frequented by pious visitors, for it shows very few traces of later use and maintenance and almost no later alterations and additions. The Eighteenth Dynasty temple, on the other hand, seems to have resumed its importance as the center of local worship. In almost every century and from almost every dynasty down to the Roman period it received improvements, alterations, and additions, so that this temple might be called a history in stone.

The dead could, of course, scarcely be buried inside a town as densely built as was Medinet Habu. Only the great temple of Amon, with its desolate halls and silenced chambers, offered opportunity to conceal mummified bodies under its stone floor slabs. Similarly, the

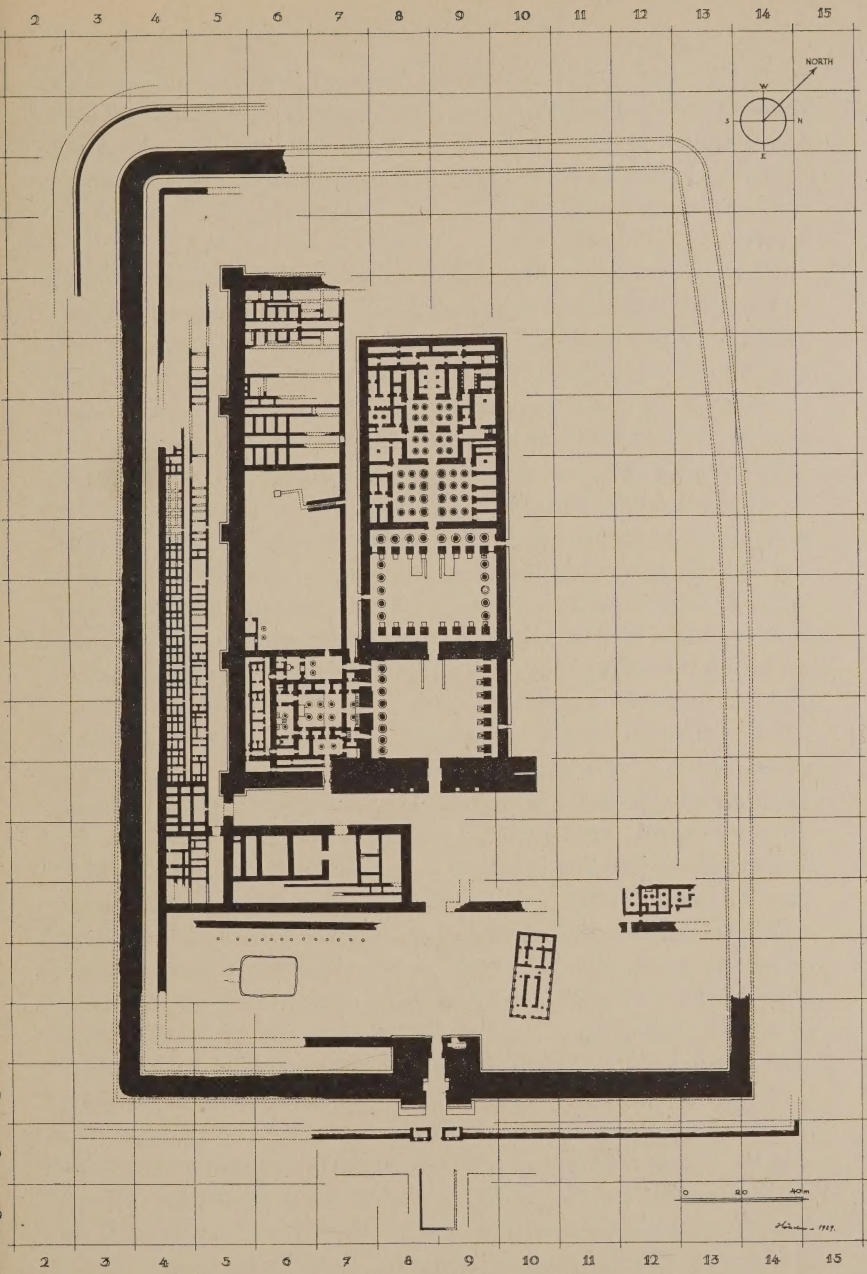


FIG. 1.—GROUND PLAN OF RAMSES III'S TEMPLE AND PALACE AND ASSOCIATED STRUCTURES

In the center is the large temple of Amon with its two forecourts. South of the first court is the royal palace. Compare the complete plan of Medinet Habu before excavation (*OIC*, No. 5, Fig. 27).

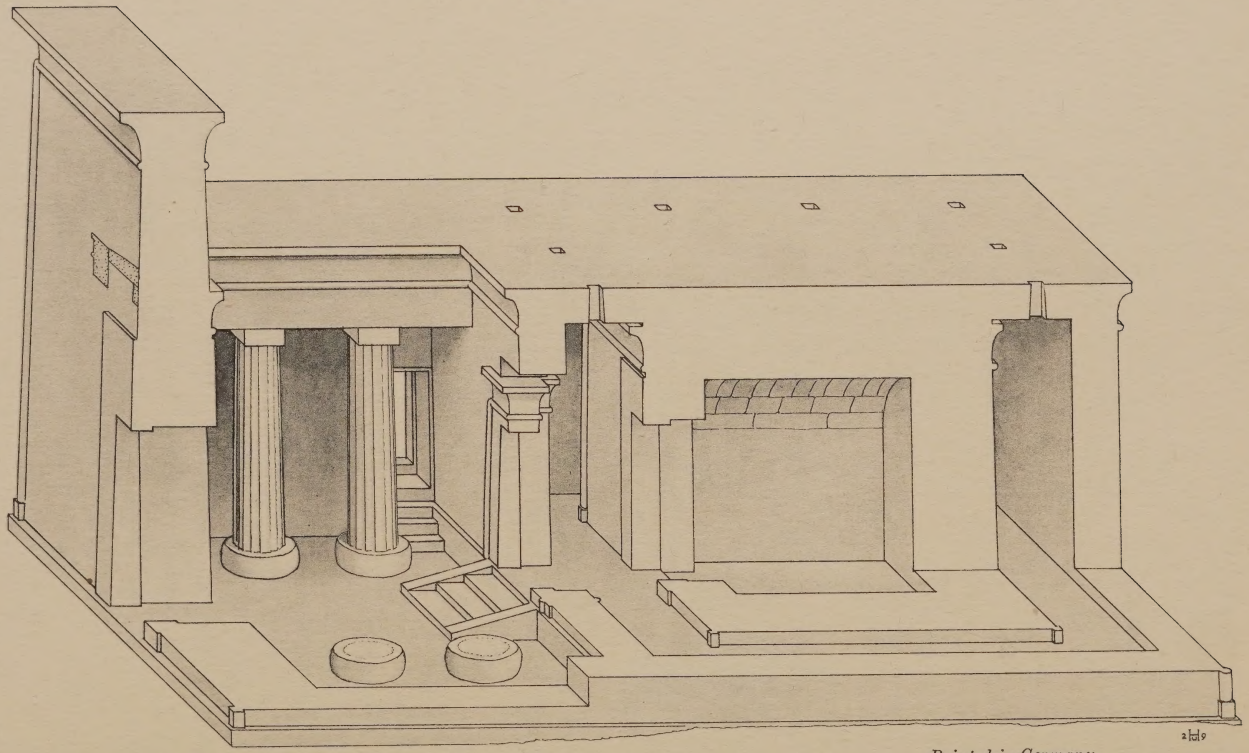
central avenue extending from the fortified gate to the temple was lined on both sides with tombs. In periods of general unrest these places inside the great walls of Medinet Habu may have been preferred for burial, since the lonely desert valleys or hillsides where the dead were ordinarily laid to rest had already become too insecure.

Already during our first season we had investigated some burials on the north side of the avenue. The most important, though unfortunately already sadly rifled, tomb belonged to a certain Harsiese who was a prince of Thebes about 850 B.C., probably under the Libyan Pharaoh Osorkon II. It was interesting to note that the granite sarcophagus in which he was laid bore the name, only superficially scratched out, of Hentmire, a sister and wife of the great Ramses II. It had evidently been stolen from the then already violated tomb of this queen, situated presumably in the near-by Valley of the Queens. Only the heavy lid was new; the original one had apparently been shattered by the tomb-robbers. So this tomb illustrates the fact, well enough known from the literature, that with the crumbling of Egyptian power after the Ramessid period the safety of even royal tombs in the lonely desert valleys could no longer be guaranteed.

On the south side of the central avenue lies a group of tombs which, together with the chapels above them, are still well preserved. These structures, of the seventh century B.C., belonged to members of the royal family, "god's-wives" and great priestesses of Amon. The best-preserved building belonged to Amenirdis I, sister of the Ethiopian Pharaoh Shabaka and mother-in-law of King Psamtik I. As a spiritual princess of Thebes, she played a well-known part in history. Adjoining are the chapels of Shepnupet II, daughter (by adoption) of the Ethiopian Piankhi; of Nitocris, daughter of Psamtik I; and lastly of Mehetnusekhet, mother of Nitocris and wife of Psamtik, who, although not a "god's-wife," was laid to rest beside her daughter.

These little temples of the time of Psamtik, that is, of the Saitic renaissance of Egyptian art, are excellent examples of such mortuary chapels. The reconstruction in Plate I should be supplemented by the reader's mental images of the wall reliefs in their original delicacy (Fig. 2). In their present state they show serious damage from fire and smoke. Similar chapels, destroyed, to be sure, except for the

PLATE I



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THE MORTUARY CHAPEL OF AMENIRDIS AT MEDINET HABU

underground burial chambers, were found farther east toward the towered gateway.

Architecturally, all these chapels have been important for the additional reason that they displayed the oldest true arches in stone

FIG. 2.—WALL RELIEF IN THE MORTUARY CHAPEL OF THE "GOD'S-WIFE" AMENIRDIS (SEVENTH CENTURY B.C.)

Compare Plate I. This relief shows how the whole wall surface of this little temple was adorned.

yet known anywhere in the world. The best-preserved of these mortuary chapels had been excavated by the Egyptian Service des Antiquités several decades ago. Even their underground burial chambers had been opened and investigated—to be sure, only enough to determine that they had been plundered in antiquity and no longer concealed any burial remains. In connection with our systematic work we

have now opened, investigated, and surveyed these vaults anew. In the course of our work it became apparent that the pillaging had taken place already in ancient Egyptian times. The sarcophagus of Nitocris, for example, had been plundered and then re-used for a second burial in the not far distant valley of Deir el-Medineh, whence it was brought to the Cairo Museum in 1884. Her tomb furnishings, ushebtis, etc., worthless to the robbers, had been thrown aside near her tomb within the Medinet Habu inclosure, where we recovered them in part. The tomb of Amenirdis had shared the same fate. The heart scarab which had been placed with the mummy of this princess was found several years ago, presumably in the vicinity, by natives and was purchased by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. We found other items of her equipment in 1927/28 in the rubbish. This year (1928/29) we found, somewhat farther to the north, a portrait statue of this princess, apparently from the chapel of Shepnupet.

Numerous other finds and discoveries important for the history of art and culture are intentionally omitted from this report, so that we may confine ourselves to our main problem, the Ramessid building-complex.

The great wall which incloses the rectangular district of Medinet Habu (Fig. 1) was this year laid bare for a long stretch inside and here and there outside. The main brick wall, 10 meters thick, the auxiliary wall before it, and the dry ditch in front of the latter, are now clearly recognizable. Along the inside of the main wall stretches an elevated roadway supported by a sloping wall. This roadway once rose as a ramp along the great wall, so that it probably formed the approach to the ramparts.

The front part of the inclosed area was a park (*E-F 4-13* in Fig. 1). In its gravelly soil one can distinguish holes which were once filled with good black earth to receive the trees that were planted there in a long row. A pond or water hole (*F 5-6*) sunk to water-bearing strata supplied the water required for the grounds as well as drink for man and beast. In the north half of this park strip lay also the above-mentioned Eighteenth Dynasty temple.

A cross-wall bounded the park on the west (*G 4-13*). Behind it, in the southern half, lay a large structure surrounded by strong walls. Its large, seemingly unroofed spaces probably contained stables and

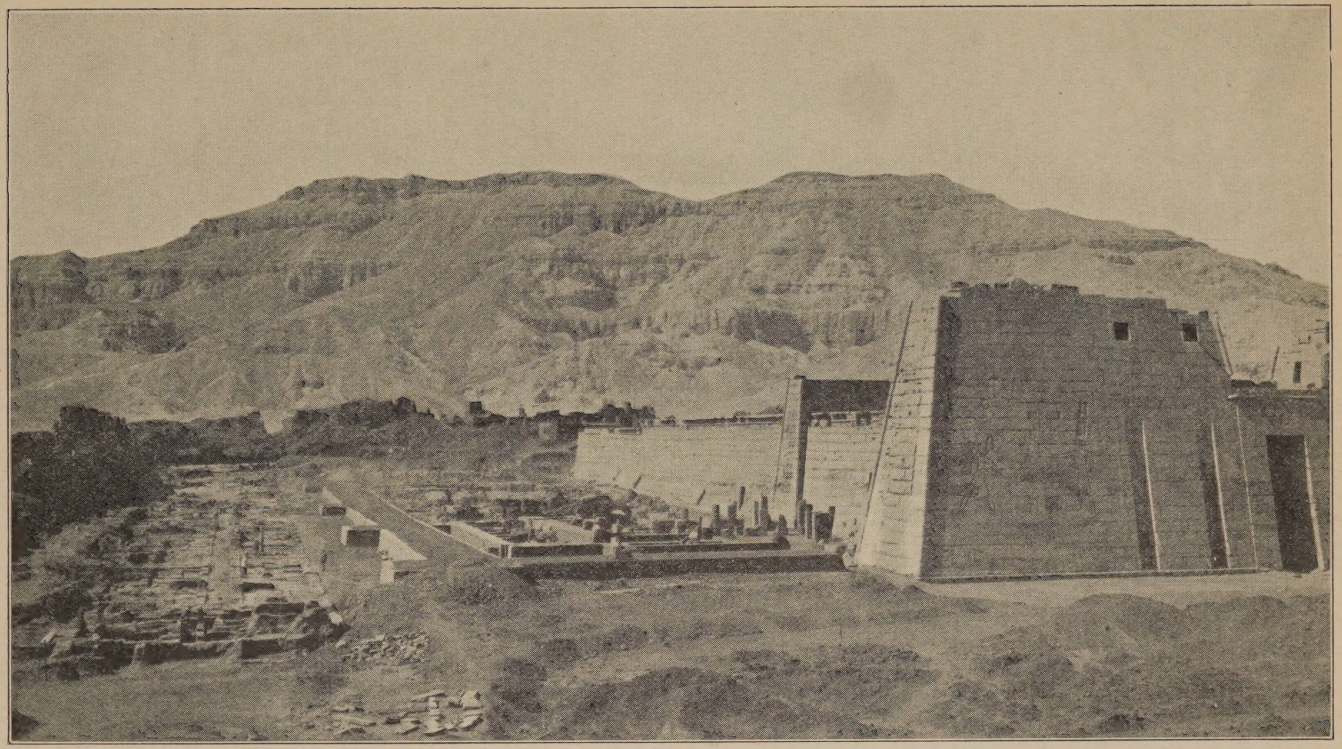


FIG. 3.—THE EXCAVATED AREA SOUTH OF THE GREAT TEMPLE

We are looking westward from the southeast corner of the great inclosure wall. At right is the great temple; at left and in the background the great brick wall which forms the outer inclosure of Medinet Habu. Between the two is the inner, tower-bordered inclosure wall which separates the royal structures (at right) from the dwellings and storehouses (at left). Compare the appearance a year earlier (*OIC*, No. 5, Fig. 28).

barnyards (*G-H 5-8*). Then came a broad roadway (*I 5-10*) stretching in front of and parallel with the first pylon of the temple.

Between the temple, the center of the whole complex, and the outer inclosure wall, stretches an inner fortification wall which was 6 meters thick, some 12 meters high, and bordered with towers. These towers (Fig. 3) stand about 40 meters apart (a distance suited to accurate and effective shooting of arrows) and probably overtopped the

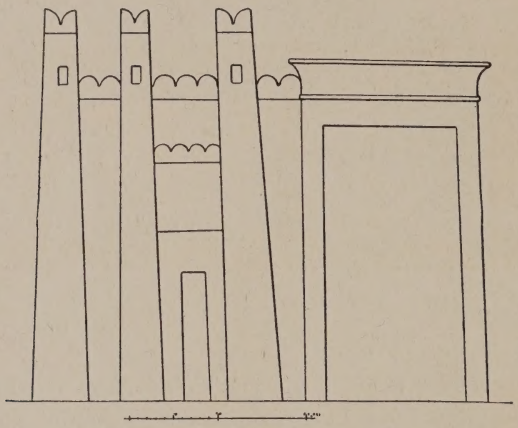


FIG. 4.—ANCIENT EGYPTIAN RENDERING OF A SANCTUARY SURROUNDED BY A TOWER-BORDERED WALL

This relief, dated to the period of Ramses III, in the Karnak temple of Khonsu, shows how the upper part of the tower-bordered wall at Medinet Habu (cf. Fig. 3) was constructed.

wall, as shown by a contemporary relief in the temple of Khonsu at Karnak (Fig. 4).

In the space, 25 meters wide, between the outer and the inner wall lie series of houses in two long rows. Our excavations of 1928/29 have shown that these were probably not workshops and dwellings for slaves captured in war,[1] but homes of officials or priests. The outer row consisted of narrow houses of more than one story; the houses of the inner row had only one story, but were correspondingly broader. Of the houses of more than one story, only the first story is preserved.

[1] A suggestion offered in *OIC*, No. 5, pp. 39–40.

This is the more to be regretted, since here for the first time in Egypt remains of such houses have been discovered.[1]

The row of one-story houses (Fig. 5) is relatively easy to interpret. It shows how the humbler people lived in Ramessid times. The houses are of a new, elongated type. A doorway in the center leads into a small, open court with a colonnaded hall at its rear facing

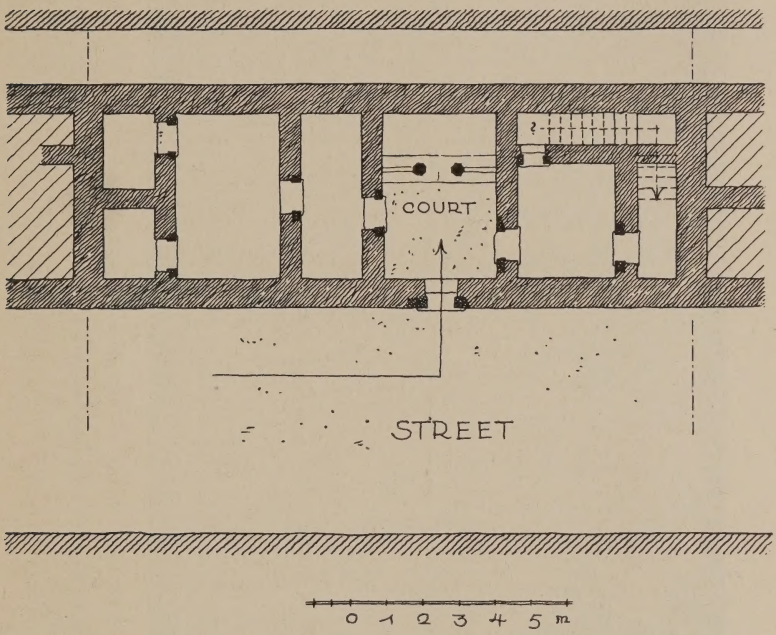


FIG. 5.—ONE OF THE HOUSES FOR OFFICIALS OR PRIESTS

Rows of such houses lie between the outer and the inner inclosure walls (cf. Fig. 1).

the north and thus providing a shady place to sit. The living-rooms proper adjoin at the left in the order already familiar to us from the royal harem.[2] At the right is another rather large room, which presumably served housekeeping needs. Behind it we must reconstruct

[1] For ancient Egyptian representations of such houses, see N. de G. Davies, "The Town House in Ancient Egypt," *Metropolitan Museum Studies*, Vol. I (1929), Part II.

[2] *OIC*, No. 5, Fig. 30.

FIG. 6.—RELIEF OVER THE RECESS IN THE THRONE ROOM OF THE FIRST PALACE

This and other wrought stone blocks from Ramses III's first palace (cf. Fig. 7) were built into the foundations of his second palace. Note traces of the original coloring.

the stairway leading to the flat roof. Of the equipment of these dwellings, their poor state of preservation has left us very little—a few stone stools, fireplaces with jars and pots, etc.

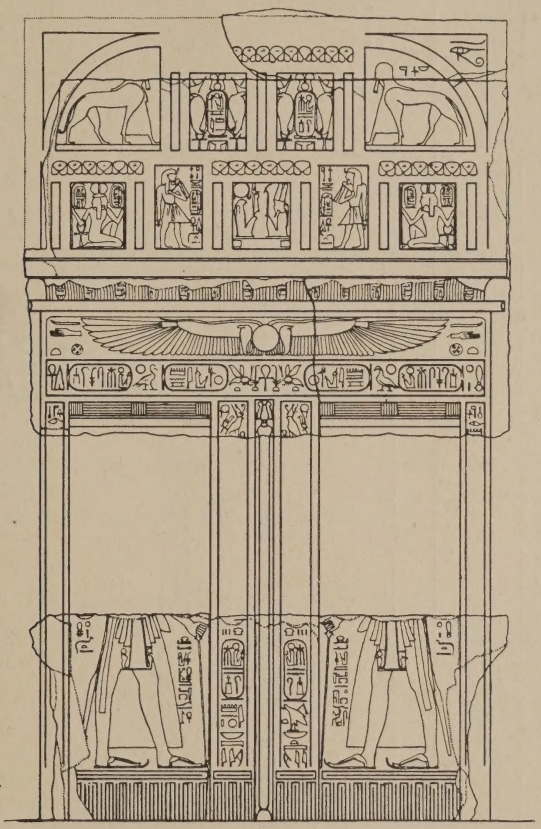


FIG. 7.—THE RECESS IN THE THRONE ROOM OF THE FIRST PALACE

It stood behind the throne. It represents double doors through which the king was pictured as entering the throne room.

At the east end of the double row of houses, in the axis of the north-south roadway, stands a large house similar in ground plan to the adjoining houses of more than one story.

Inside the inner wall lie the royal structures and the great store-

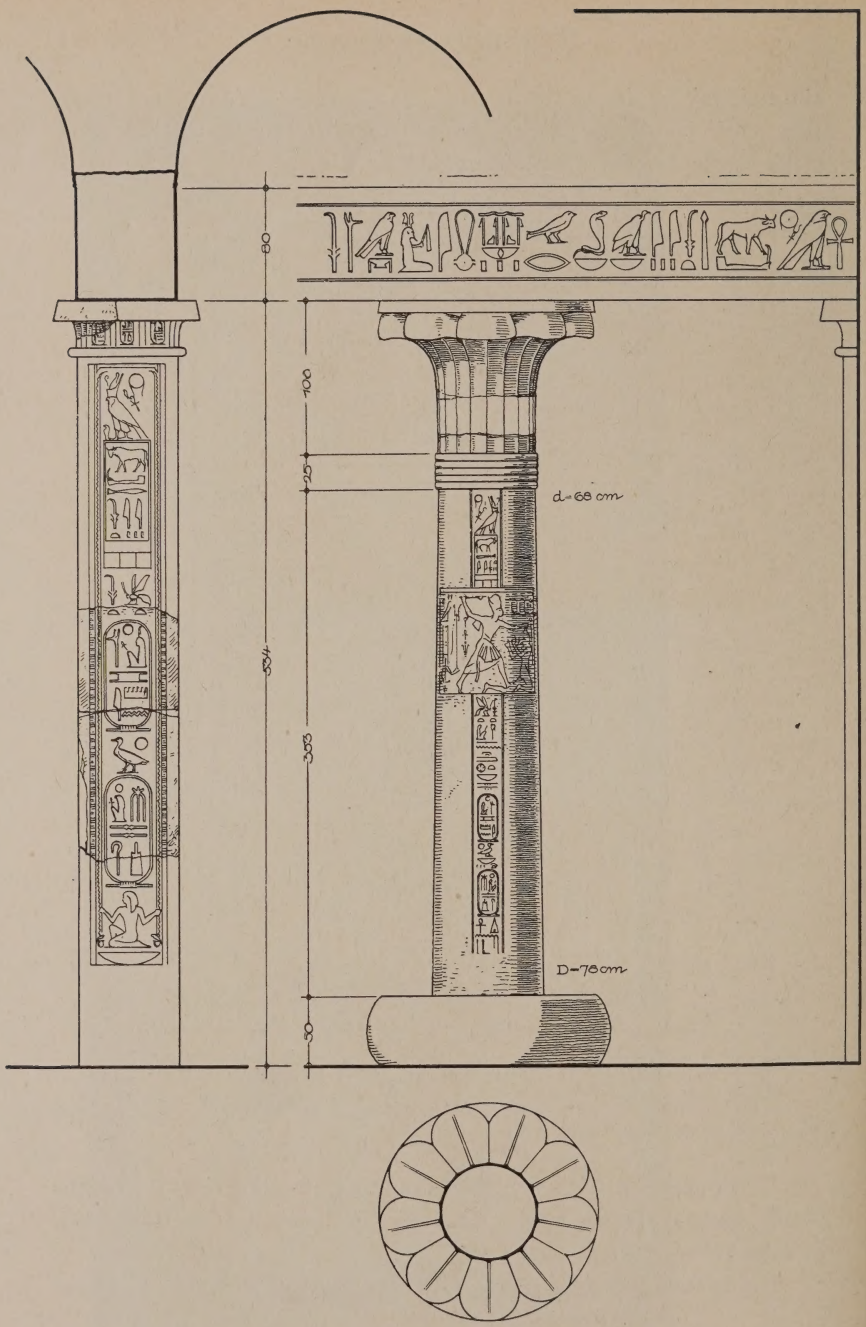


FIG. 8.—COLUMN AND PILASTER FROM THE FIRST PALACE

From a very heavy base rises the shaft of the column, inscribed and decorated and topped with a capital in the form of nine palm leaves. The pilaster, like the column, is of sandstone. It was built into the wall, which consists otherwise of mud bricks, in order to provide a firm support for the stone architraves.

FIG. 9.—HEADS OF BOUND PRISONERS OF WAR

These consoles were set beneath the balcony window of the first palace, on the side toward the temple court (cf. *OIC*, No. 5, Fig. 32). The various races of the enemy are distinctly recognizable.

FIG. 10.—A FALSE WINDOW PROBABLY BELONGING TO THE SECOND PALACE

Numerous fragments of real windows of similar style were also found.

houses of the temple. As we had already learned in 1927/28, Ramses III himself had torn down his first palace toward the end of his reign and replaced it by a second palace. The ground plans and elevations of both these palaces[1] were exhaustively re-examined in our second campaign. During the work a lucky chance restored to us the most essential architectural elements of the first palace. The great wrought blocks from this demolished first palace had been built into the foundations of the second palace and into other structures in the vicinity and could be recovered. They included columns, pilasters, architraves, parts of doorways, wall niches, and the base of the throne (Figs. 6–8). These pieces prove that our previous reconstructions were correct in their dimensions, and permit us now to sketch the principal rooms of the first palace with absolute certainty of all the details involved in their reconstruction (Plates II and III).

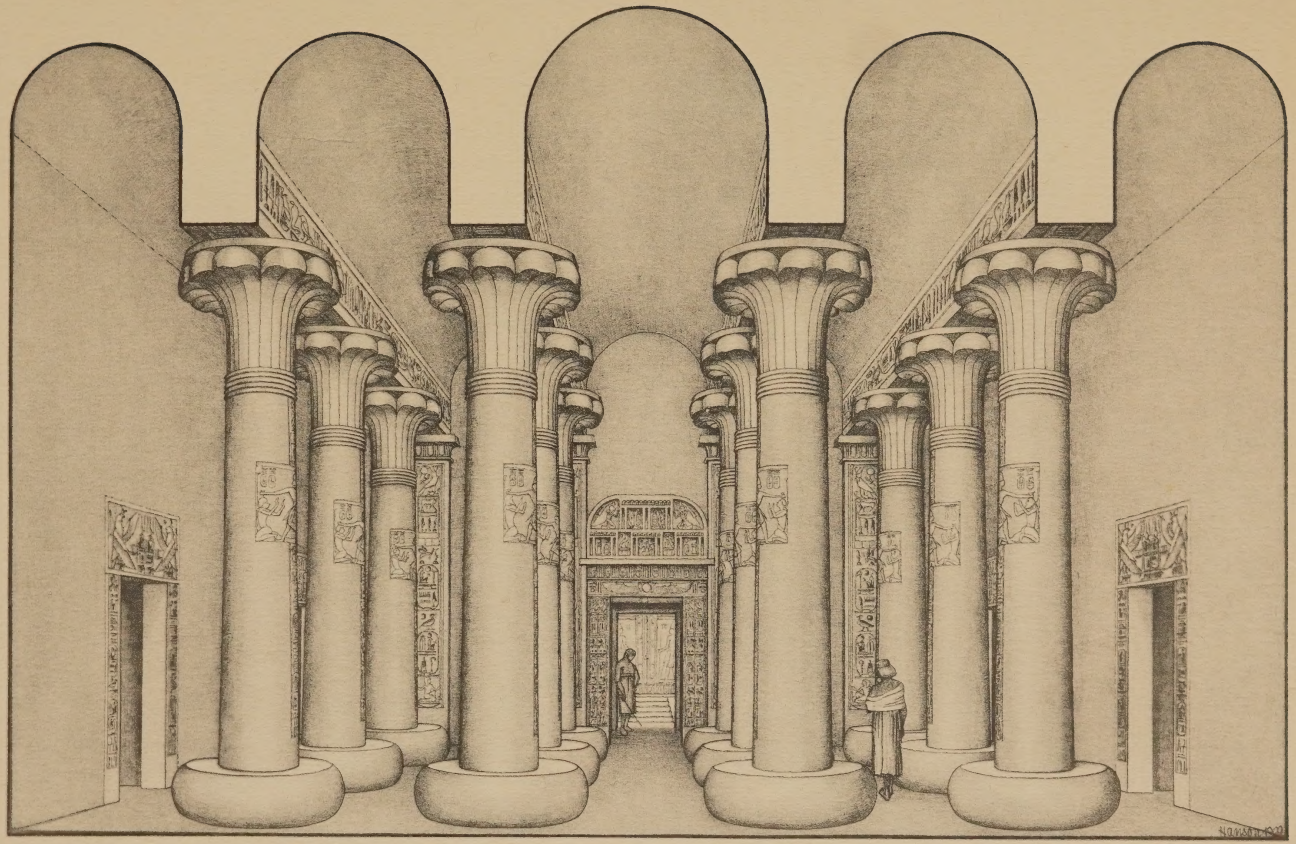
The twelve-columned audience hall is so filled with massive columns that only a section can adequately indicate its arrangement. To take in the room at a single glance was in reality quite impossible, for the profusion of close-set columns prevented the necessary breadth of vision. One could only walk about among the trunks of this dusky forest enjoying ever new vistas, just as in the hypostyle halls of the great temples. The walls and the barrel vaults were of mud brick. They are, therefore, irretrievably lost. But some idea of the brilliant paintings which once covered them can be derived from the front wall of the hall, since that wall, which forms at the same time part of the outside of the temple, was made of stone and is therefore well preserved.[2]

There are no traces of windows in this hall. There may have been narrow slits in the ceiling-vaults, such as occur in the stone ceilings of the chapel of Amenirdis (Plate I). But light entered the hall chiefly from the front, where steps led up to a high balcony window[3] where the king was wont to make his appearance before the "great men, princes, and officers of the infantry and chariotry" gathered in the court below. At one time the opening toward the court was much narrower than it is now. Under it stretched a sculptured row of twenty-one prisoners' heads, projecting from the wall like consoles, so

[1] *Ibid.*, Figs. 29–35.

[2] *Ibid.*, Fig. 33.

[3] *Ibid.*, Fig. 32.



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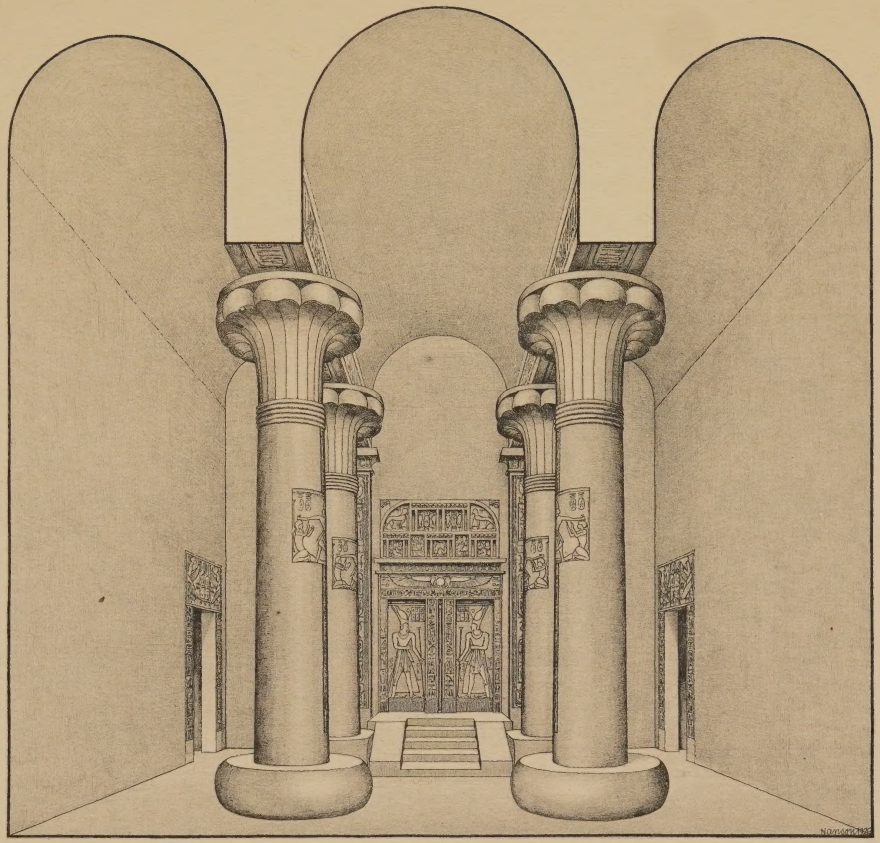
THE AUDIENCE HALL IN THE FIRST PALACE OF RAMSES III. RECONSTRUCTION



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THE THRONE ROOM IN THE FIRST PALACE OF RAMSES III. RECONSTRUCTION

that when the king appeared at the window he seemed to stand upon these prisoners. In building the second palace, this balcony window was widened. In the process the seven prisoners' heads in the middle were knocked out and discarded. By a lucky chance we managed to find them (Fig. 9). These are much better preserved than the ones *in situ*. Both the plastic treatment and the coloring bring out clearly the

FIG. 11.—RE-ERECTION OF A FALLEN LINTEL IN THE HAREM

Compare the ground plan of the royal harem in *OIC*, No. 5, Fig. 30, and Figure 13 in this present report.

racial characteristics of the Negroes, Libyans, Semites, etc., represented.

Behind the audience hall with its twelve columns lay the smaller, four-columned throne room (Plate III), constructed in the same style as the former. The base of the throne had steps in front and was decorated on the sides with reliefs of bound prisoners. Behind it rose a richly framed recess such as is found in many temples, especially at Abydos. As shown by the reliefs, the recess represents double doors through which the king might be imagined as emerging from his pri-

FIG. 12.—A RE-ERECTED DOORWAY INTO THE HAREM COURT

The restored portions of the doorway are left bare of decoration. The lintel was put together out of more than twenty fragments.

FIG. 13.—RESTORATIONS AT THE SECOND PALACE

We look southward from the south wall of the temple. At left in the foreground is the corner of the first pylon. Beside it are brick foundations, thresholds, and remains of columns of the palace as excavated. In the middle distance the foundations are hidden under a layer of sand and rubbish. In the background is the restored rear portion of the palace. The stone columns, pilasters, and bases of the thrones are almost without exception ancient, whereas the connecting brick walls rising upon the ancient foundations are for the most part restored.

vate apartments. Beside it stands the inscription: "The king appears in the palace of his august temple."

Of all these architectural members, the original positions of which we have positively determined, unfortunately nothing can be replaced *in situ*, because the second palace, with an entirely different arrangement of rooms, was built on top of the first palace. But we may hope that these pieces will be set up later in a small local museum near-by to bring out as well as possible their original effect.

Of the second palace also, built by Ramses III a few decades later to replace the first, the ground plan and elevation had been determined in the main during the first campaign.[1] In 1928/29 it was our object to complete the details of the picture previously gained (Fig. 10).

As shown in *OIC*, No. 5, Figure 28, we found the palace largely destroyed. The walls had for the most part been removed down to the foundations. What was to be done with these exposed foundations? It is well known that excavated mud-brick walls cannot be preserved even in the dry climate of Upper Egypt. The thinner and lower the surviving portions, the more quickly they disintegrate after exposure. The only means of prevention is to cover them up again with sand and rubbish after investigating and measuring them. But that means taking away from our contemporaries the possibility of checking our conclusions. We could not make up our minds to do that in the case of this highly significant royal palace.

The problem was further complicated by the fact that the ruins did not consist exclusively of mud-brick walls, for all the essential architectural elements were of sandstone. But relatively few of the

[1] See *OIC*, No. 5, Figs. 30 and 35.

FIG. 14.—GENERAL VIEW OF THE RESTORED PORTION OF THE SECOND PALACE

Compare the ground plan in *OIC*, No. 5, Figure 30. In the center the two-columned private living-room of the king is plainly recognizable. At left is his small bedroom with a raised recess for the bed. Then comes a standing gateway with a narrow corridor behind it leading to the harem. At right lies the room through which the private apartments were entered, and beside it the royal bath and toilet and a small side room. The three harem apartments continue still farther to the right, extending behind the royal quarters. The front rooms of the palace have not yet been restored, but are marked by lines on our picture.

stone pilasters, columns, doorposts, and the like remained standing *in situ*. Many had collapsed; they lay partly where they had fallen, partly in the vicinity at places whither they had been dragged. So far as their original position in the building was certain, we re-erected them, restoring a few relatively small fragments (Figs. 11 and 12). But the palace ruins, already obscure in arrangement and scarcely intelligible to a visitor, acquired thereby almost the appearance of a

FIG. 15.—THE PHARAOH'S TWO-COLUMNED LIVING-ROOM WITH THE ALABASTER BASE OF HIS THRONE

Three steps lead up to the throne, on which the king probably sat when he was being robed for temple ceremonies in the fantastic fashion shown in the temple reliefs. The bases of the columns are of elegant black granite; their shafts are of sandstone.

desolate Turkish cemetery, in which many tombstones loom without order or plan.

We decided, therefore, to rebuild to a uniform height the destroyed mud-brick walls between the preserved or re-erected stone jambs, in order to restore the continuity of the walls and to make intelligible the

plan of the palace (Figs. 13–17). In doing so, after thoroughly photographing and drafting them in detail, we took care to guard the ancient brick foundations against further destruction by an intervening layer of sand. They are thus preserved for verification, if desired, by a critical later generation. Moreover, the expert will easily recognize the modernity of the restored walls by the smaller bricks employed in the restoration.

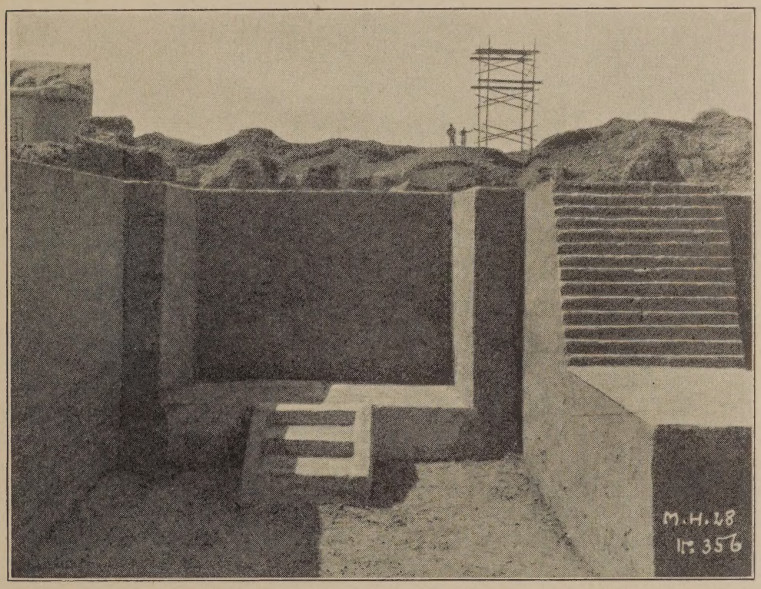

FIG. 16.—THE PHARAOH'S BEDROOM

The raised recess, reached by a small flight of steps, is a scant 2 meters long, so that a wooden bedstead such as is familiar to us from various surviving examples will just fit it.

Circumstances thus forced us to proceed step by step from excavation to conservation and from conservation to restoration. We were thoroughly conscious of the responsibility we were undertaking, for restoration is an activity which has only too often wrought irreparable harm to ancient monuments of art. We felt obliged, however, to undertake the task in this instance, because there seemed to be no other way by which the palace—the only royal palace in Egypt as yet known in detail—could be preserved for posterity.

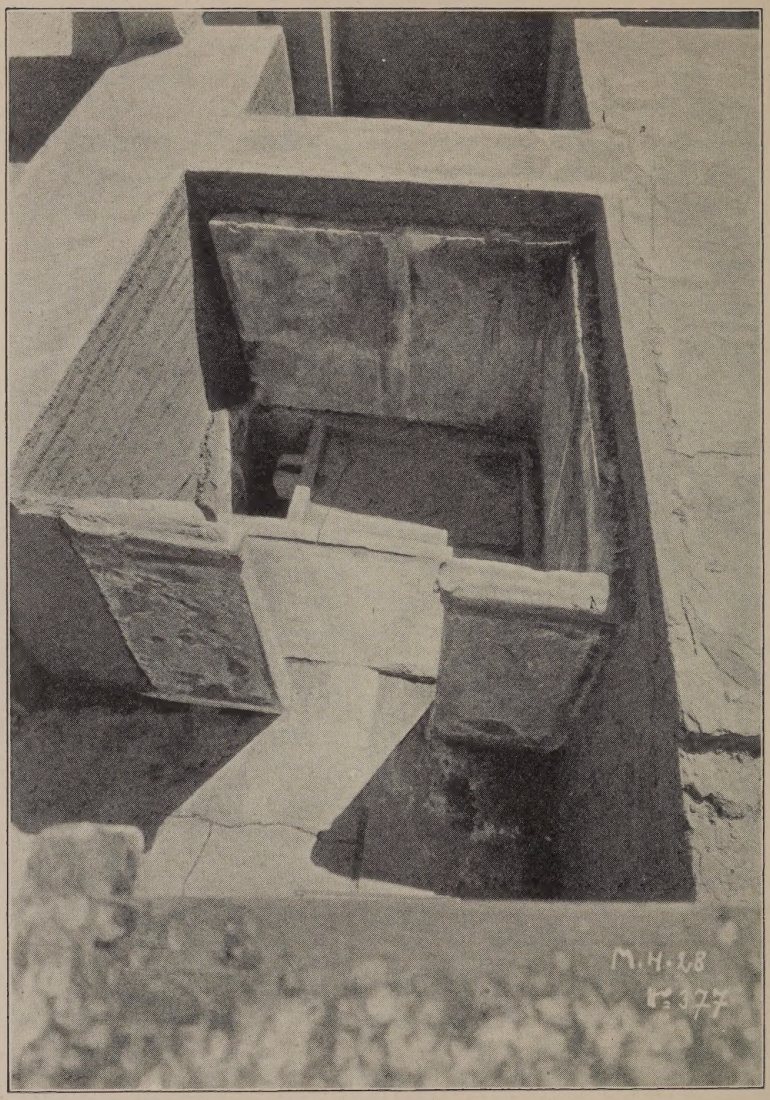

FIG. 17.—A BATH AND TOILET IN THE HAREM

A bird's-eye view permits us to look beyond the screen wall, which prevented observation through the entrance, and note the arrangement of the room, with its wall sheathing, its hollowed-out floor slab, and the drainage into a basin set at a lower level.

Little need be said as to the course of the second campaign of excavation. The digging continued from the end of October, 1928, to the middle of March, 1929. The writer was assisted by Messrs. Steckeweh and Hanson. The photography was in charge first of Mr. Morrison and afterward of Mr. Leichter. In one way the work was much easier than that of the previous year, for now we had at our disposal a group of native workmen specially trained for this kind of excavation. Unfortunately, the seven native foremen whom we had taken over in 1927/28 from the Megiddo Expedition, with their *reis*, Hamid Ahmad Hamid, were not available for our second season, because they were needed at Megiddo itself. So we had to give the post of head *reis* to a new man, Sharid Muhammad Mansur. Though he is still rather young for such a large undertaking, he is reliable and very energetic, so that we expect to keep him at the head of the native workmen.

The small excavation house where we make our headquarters during the day has had a veranda added to it, on which one may sit sheltered from the countless flies which make it difficult for one to work in the open. A new storehouse erected beside it to shelter the finds has already been completely filled, so during next season an addition will have to be built.

The division of the finds has not yet taken place, but by agreement with the Egyptian Service des Antiquités has been postponed until the whole mass of material found can be examined at the conclusion of the excavation.

II

THE LANGUAGE OF THE HISTORICAL TEXTS COMMEMORATING RAMSES III

By JOHN A. WILSON

A cultured Egyptian scribe of the twelfth century before Christ, well versed in the classics of his literature, might have bewailed the degenerate style of the temple scribes of his day. Remembering the crisp campaign annals of Thutmose III, he would shudder at the florid bombast with which Ramses III choked his records. Remembering the relatively pure Egyptian of the old literary classics, he would be oppressed by the straining artificiality evidenced by a profusion of foreign words and far-fetched metaphor. Remembering, if he could, the more rigid rules of grammar which defended the purity of the classical literature, he would feel a lofty pity for these scribes who labored to employ the old grammar but whose efforts were defeated by ignorance, haste, and the sheer weight of the spoken language. He would doubtless declare that the poets had sold their very souls for Pharaoh's gold.

If a modern may express an opinion on Egyptian style, this scribe would be just in his criticism of the temple compositions of his day, for the Medinet Habu texts are turgid, careless, and grammatically irregular. However, in comparing the Ramessid style with that of the classical Egyptian literature, he would be too severe. We must remember that at least three hundred very active years separate the Medinet Habu texts from the literature upon which they vaguely pattern themselves. When our more conservative poets compose verse, they build with a language which owes much to the Elizabethans and to the King James version of the Bible. If we are to accept the language of the Bible as a standard of grammar and style, our own speech will appear sadly degenerate; for correct literary English of the twentieth century uses a vocabulary and a grammar which would have been quite outlandish in King James's day. How much wider must have been the change in ancient Egypt, where the *spoken* language had

greater relative weight and where education was less general and less systematized. Again, we must remember that the "high" literature of any period has a decided drift toward artificiality. Those classic Egyptian models, the stories of Sinuhe and of the Eloquent Peasant, have far more affectation of style than such straightforward folk tales as those in the Papyrus Westcar or the Papyrus d'Orbiney. Yet all of these stories are more native, more subtly human, and less stupidly pompous than the Medinet Habu texts.

These texts are the culmination of an artificial poetizing which began under Thutmose III, at the latest. There was composed for this great conqueror a hymn of victory, in which poetic fancy was allowed full play.[1] Recently discovered fragments of papyri suggest that the pretentious epics of battle, which find their best-known expression in the Poem of Kadesh, go back at least as far as Thutmose III. Ramses III is able to plagiarize from his immediate predecessors entire inscriptions, which needed only to be brought up to date to be quite in place at Medinet Habu.[2] But these poems had already lost their novelty. It is almost literally true that the Pharaoh had already received every complimentary comparison and every glorifying epithet that the hard-pushed scribes could devise. In a wrong-minded effort at reinvigoration, they only laid it on the thicker. It is easy to make a slurring comparison between the Medinet Habu inscriptions and such a simple, human record as that on the Piankhi Stela, but the Ramessid texts were as much a product of their period as was the Piankhi Stela. The Egypt of Ramses III was big, cosmopolitan, somewhat jaded, and more than a little cynical. It stood only a generation before disintegration.[3]

[1] Of course such forms could not spring into being fully formed, without ancestry. Indeed, we may trace the germ of such poems back to the Middle Kingdom, to the hymn in honor of Sesostris III. But as yet we know of no poems dealing with a single campaign earlier than the time of Thutmose III.

[2] Three inscriptions on the front of the first pylon have known ancestors. One, "The Blessing of Ptah," is adapted from Ramses II's time. A second, consisting of a speech by Amon-Re, is taken from Seti I. The third, another speech of Amon-Re, is appropriated from Seti I, who in turn borrowed from Amenhotep III. This is, to be sure, in keeping with the geographical lists on the first pylon, which Ramses III blandly copied from earlier lists, without regard for accuracy or consistency.

[3] Our remarks are based on the historical texts of the temple of Medinet Habu in the narrowest sense of the word, that is, those inscriptions which concern them-

Let us analyze one of the long historical poems of the temple. In justice it must be admitted that it is the most extreme specimen of its kind. This is an inscription on the rear of the first pylon, dated in the eleventh year of Ramses' reign, and purports to relate the course of the second Libyan war. It is sixty-two lines long. Following the date and title come thirteen lines in general praise of Pharaoh. Then follows a "historical" section of twenty-two lines on the aggression of the Libyans, their defeat and pursuit. This, however, is not given in narrative form but is imbedded deep in a matrix of royal glorification, where fact is almost buried in pretentious poetry. The scribe was, of course, far more interested in the matrix than in the nuggets of fact. Thereafter, in thirteen lines, the defeated enemy laud their conqueror, a characteristic trick of these poems. The abasement of the foe to the glory of Ramses takes up eight more lines, and the inscription ends with six lines wherein the Pharaoh, with his customary modesty, describes his glorious achievements. Thus we find that about a third of this long text is concerned with an important historical event, and even that third is almost suffocated in glorification of the king.

This may be taken as typical of these epics of battle. In such inscriptions we find a fulsome eulogy of the king following the title. The kernel of narration is always buried in the center and is liberally edited in the royal favor. The sorry plight of the defeated foe and their overgenerous exclamations in praise of their conqueror follow. The final section deals generally with the king's benefactions to Egypt. We must remember that these compositions are not histories of campaigns but dithyrambic propaganda to ennoble his majesty in the sight of

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selves with the wars of Ramses III. Of course the temple contains a mass of other inscriptions, dedicatory, building, calendar, and religious. Each class of texts has its own language. For example, the scenes of the Feast of Min are accompanied by a series of explanatory notes and fragments of ritual which probably descend from a very distant ancestor. In every respect these documents are poles apart from the war texts. The latter were much less guarded by prophylactic tradition; consequently, it is the war poems that broke out into the full rash of Ramessid style. Again, it must be noted that there are two types of historical inscriptions: (1) the lengthy poems and (2) the brief texts accompanying the reliefs. The latter serve vaguely as explanatory titles to the scenes which they accompany, but consist to a great extent of rather staccato eulogy of the king, complimentary dialogues between king and god, or laudatory chants by the Greek chorus of courtiers and captives.

gods and men. This may attain noble proportions in its finest form, as on the Israel Stela of Merneptah. In Medinet Habu, unfortunately, one feels that the poet is driven to protest too volubly. This insistent stressing of the magnificence and valor of the Pharaoh seems to mean either that a mediocre ruler had to be raised to the standard of his predecessors by excited protests or, more probably, that the jaded palate of his people demanded a more exotic and highly seasoned fare. One might point to a parallel in our own day. A public which saw the World War, which enjoys the automobile, the radio, and the motion picture, demands from its press a force and color of subject matter and language, a vicarious excitement from the printed word, that is unprecedented in recent times.

To illustrate this further, let us take a few lines of the same text which we examined above, from the section treating of the flight and pursuit of the defeated Libyans. We translate freely, as the inscription is unique in phraseology and now so broken that literal certainty is out of the question. The enemy

> rose up and fled to the ends of the earth . . . . . The pupils of their eyes squinted so that they could not see. The roads were blocked and stopped up before them, while the world was a whirlwind behind them to carry off their people. Their weapons had fallen from their hands, and their hearts knew no rest. . . . . They were straggling, trembling and sweating. The *uraeus*-serpent which is upon the head of the Sun of Egypt (Pharaoh) was against them, so that the great heat of (the war-goddess) Sekhmet permeated their hearts and their bones were burned up within their bodies. The stars of the *seshed*-constellation were frightful in pursuit of them, while the land (of Egypt) was glad and rejoiced at the sight of his valor: Ramses III.

These are the words which tell us that the enemy fled in utter confusion, while Ramses was hot in pursuit of them. To these two thoughts all the elaborations of imaginative detail are contributory. We have been given, as it were, a prototype of the song of Deborah:

> From heaven fought the stars,
> From their courses they fought against Sisera.
> The river Kishon swept them away,
> That ancient river, the river Kishon.

But the bald account of the battle has been withheld from us.

Again, within the space of five consecutive lines, Ramses is compared to a hunting falcon, an angry bull, a strong wall of protection, a

roaring griffon, and a swift-running jackal, while at the same time it is admitted that he was an unerring marksman with the bow. These bewildering transformations hardly enhance for us the dignity of his majesty, but this heaping-up of figures is a much admired characteristic of oriental poetry. In rapid succession David likens Jehovah to a lamp, a shield, a rock, and a fortress. For the pictorially minded, a cinematographic strip may convey an impression of ferocity or protection where mere words would fall flat.

Since this account may have become somewhat depressing, it is necessary that we emphasize the presence of some forceful and vivid passages in the texts. A section describing the peaceful state of Egypt resulting from Ramses' good works relates that the land is so secure that the peasant woman may tuck up her skirt and go serenely abroad where she will, with free stride. "The land is (stretched out) flat on its back without a care; (for he is) a wall casting shade for the people, and they rest beside it in confidence of heart." To anyone who has traveled in Mediterranean lands, the care-free security envisaged in these words will be very intelligible. As the Egyptian army waited impatiently for the clash of battle, "their horses were quivering in every limb, ready to crush the foreign countries under their hoofs." Succinctly the attack of Ramses is pictured in the words: "His majesty fell upon them like a mountain of granite." One of the best figures is set in a conventional formula, as a promise of the god Amon to Ramses: "I shall make them see thy majesty like the sky overcast and bursting with storm, so that the trees are tossed before it down to their very roots."

There is a colloquial character to some of the words which sounds suspiciously like modern slang. Especially is this true in the accounts of the sorry plight of the enemy, always a fertile field for Egyptian humor. We have no one unquestioned case of this vulgar trend, but the cumulative evidence is impressive. Tentatively we may render one of these phrases: "The heart of the land of Temeh is taken away; the Peleset *are all up in the air*, hidden away in their towns." Again: "Those who attack him are thrown down *tail foremost*." More vulgarly and with a graphic determinative, we find: "Meshesher, (the defeated Libyan prince, is lying) *wide open* on the ground," and "the Meshwesh *give birth* out of fear of me." Such passages bring us nearer

to the Egyptian, with his mocking, somewhat ribald, and essentially pictorial humor.

We have been speaking of the Medinet Habu inscriptions as "poetry." This term refers rather to the lyric content and phraseology of these texts than to any metrical cast. Quantities of vowels and even the vowels themselves are not yet sufficiently determined for us to establish any definite cadence of verse. Indeed, Professor Erman has pointed out that free rhythm rather than a rigid meter characterizes Egyptian poetry. The most obvious verse characteristic is a sonorous balance of utterance, familiar to us from the Old Testament. Thus, in the inscription which we have already analyzed, does Ramses III call attention to the glories of his reign, speaking in carefully co-ordinated sentences:

Give heed to my utterances;
Hearken to them.

I speak to you;
I make you aware

That I am the son of Re,
Who issued from his body.

I sit upon his throne in rejoicing,
Since he established me as king,
As lord of this land.

My counsels are good;
My plans come to pass.

I protect Egypt;
I defend it.

I make it sit content in my time;
I overthrow for it every invader of its boundary.

I am rich in Niles bearing provisions;
My reign is flooded with good things.[1]

It is clear that the length of any line here has a very general relation to the length of its parallel member, but no relation at all to the length of lines in other couplets. It will also be seen that this balance of members may extend even to a phrase within a couplet, as where "as king"

[1] Three obvious restorations have been included without special indication.

receives the additional "as lord of this land" for well-rounded elegance. The whole grandiloquent utterance is obviously "sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal," but it is unfortunately characteristic of much of the content of these supposedly historical texts.

However much a jungle the Medinet Habu inscriptions may be for the historian, they provide good hunting for the philologist. On the paleographic side, they offer much of interest. In general, the cutting of signs is coarse and careless. To a certain extent the quality of stone used condones this. Groupings of hieroglyphs occur such as no self-respecting Egyptologist would allow in a book of his. Evidence of haste is universal, notably in the inconsistencies of size, spacing, and grouping. We may find the signs in one line gross and wide apart, but small and cramped in the next column, with no obvious reason for this difference. Our chief interest lies in the forms of individual hieroglyphs. The ancient outline-draftsmen, who laid out the ink bases upon which the sculptors cut the signs, were clearly scribes who were more familiar with hieratic script than with hieroglyphs. Thus we may see the serpent cut as the tongue , the chisel as the jar , or the shepherd as the king with a crook (No. 1 in Fig. 18). Again, signs tend to range toward their hieratic form. The numeral "30" is twice so cut in the temple (No. 2), the kiln is often rendered in its cursive form (Nos. 3 and 4), and even so common a sign as may be cut summarily like its hieratic form (No. 5). A student of the origin of signs could place little reliance upon the Medinet Habu hieroglyphs. With scribes who were more at home in hieratic, with sculptors who obviously had no set models to copy, they had entirely lost sight of the genesis of individual signs. The butcher's knife is here represented as a furniture leg (Nos. 6 and 7); the palace is a quiver with rounded bottom, its battlements becoming the arrows (No. 8); the bird *sd3*, which we suppose to have been an egret, becomes generalized into a dying duck (No. 9). In the field of color, the Medinet Habu hieroglyphs may be studied with profit. In certain parts of the temple painted details have been beautifully preserved. Even here it must be noted that the colors often show inconsistencies, so that one must gather a considerable number of specimens before any generalizations are possible as to the original colors.

Grammatically the texts are of an unusual interest. To a certain

degree this interest lies in the failure of the Medinet Habu scribes to write the "Middle Egyptian" grammar at which they were aiming. When a modern says: "Between you and I, I know whom the guilty person is," he gives us a picture of himself and of his uncharted searching after correct diction. But there is slightly more to the case of the Ramessid scribe. He was groping after a style which had passed out of general use many centuries before, for which there was probably no

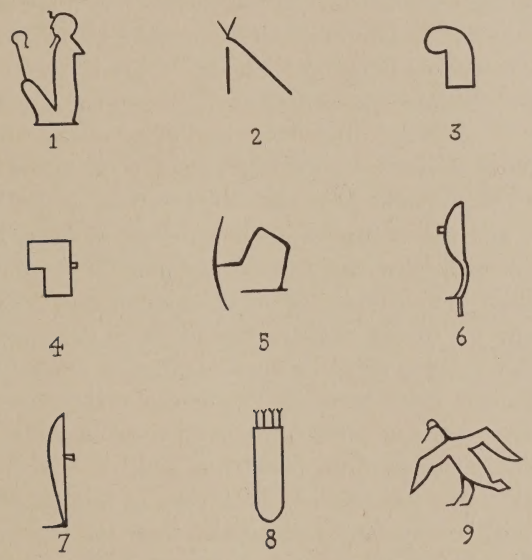

FIG. 18.—ABNORMAL FORMS OF HIEROGLYPHS AT MEDINET HABU

uniform codification. In his failures and in the very effort of his successes, he tells us something about the grammar of his goal and the grammar of his day. We must only be patient enough to sift it out. Thus, when we find an old form side by side with , the later form, we know that the former is a conscious effort at correctness, while the latter is an unconscious employment of the current usage. The employment of , normally "after," in place of the older "throughout," is a false archaism which suggests that the earlier preposition had entirely passed out of use. A certain vagueness about the endings of the participial and old perfective forms tells us that current speech was equally vague or else already committed to a

fairly general suppression of endings. Interesting also are the frequent full writings of the prosthetic *alif* (occasionally as) and of the *status pronominalis*. One might study these two forms at Medinet Habu with some profit; but such a study as the force of the negative words would fall flat, as the Ramessid scribe is irresponsibly impartial in his use of , , , and .

Many characteristic features of what we call "New Egyptian," the language of the scribe's day, are present, as they were perhaps too orally unobtrusive to be rooted out. To cite only a few, we might mention a somewhat indiscriminate use of the genitival adjectives , , and ; presence of both the prepositions (as "because of") and "with"; the determined infinitive; and a vagueness in the feminine endings. On the other hand, such characteristic features of New Egyptian as the conjunctive prefix , the preposition , and the conjunctions and are conspicuously absent. Should we, after a moderate amount of study, attempt to write Elizabethan English, we might expect to fall into similar inconsistencies. We should be so rigidly on our guard to avoid major pitfalls that we should trip on a number of minor snags.

The Medinet Habu texts are extreme in their choice of words. They exhibit a straining after the unusual word or phrase, a characteristic which is typical of the period and which is best illustrated in the satirical Papyrus Anastasi I. They take an especial relish in employing foreign words, borrowed usually from the Semitic tongues. Here is exhibited a striving for an arresting effect, a rather childish display of erudition, and also an increased internationalism. That Semitic words should be so profusely present in Medinet Habu points to cultural interrelations on a very brisk scale throughout the ancient Near East. Our own language exhibits this same borrowing from other tongues on a wide scale, with the difference that we tend to adopt foreign words and phrases for which we have no exact English equivalents, whereas the Ramessid scribe often abandoned a perfectly good Egyptian word in favor of the more arresting importation. Further, the texts show a goodly number of unique native Egyptian words, perhaps colloquialisms which the breaking-down of old barriers had permitted to flow over into temple documents. We have already hinted at these above. Both the foreign words and the colloquialisms

make the records less immediately intelligible, but ultimately they enrich our vocabulary and we are grateful for them.

It will perhaps be obvious that such generalizations as we have made with regard to the spirit of the Medinet Habu inscriptions apply with almost equal force to the Medinet Habu reliefs. Both are kindred aspects of the artistic, intellectual, and social life of the time. Both culminate the trend of the preceding centuries, but such a climax do they reach that they seem superficially to represent a distinct break with the past. A different set of ideals motivated their authors, who were essentially the same Egyptians as their ancestors. A loss in dignity and orthodoxy is partially counterbalanced by a gain in force and variety.

After all, who are we, moderns and mortals, to pass judgment on Medinet Habu? The king of the gods once found abundant satisfaction therein. It is written:

> He made a monument for his father Amon; he made the House-of-Millions-of-Years on the west of Thebes. It is the place of his (Amon's) heart's content in the region of the Western Mountain, the sacred soil of the lord of the gods, the place of repose for his Nine Gods, a holy shrine since "the time of the god" for the king of the gods. He is content and satisfied in it. Whenever he visits it, he is joyful of heart.

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